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SOCIALISM AND THE FAMILY

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SOCIALISM AND THE FAMILY

These are two papers written by Mr. H. G. Wells. The first was read to the Fabian Society in October, 1906, under the title of "Socialism and the Middle Classes." The second appeared first in the "Independent Review." Together they state pretty completely the attitude of Modern Socialism to family life.

I

IN this paper I am anxious to define and discuss the relationship between three distinct things :

- (1) Socialism, i.e. a large, a slowly elaborating conception of a sane and organized state and moral culture to replace our present chaotic way of living,
- (2) the Socialist movement, and
- (3) the Middle Classes.

The first is to me a very great thing indeed, the form and substance of my ideal life, and all the religion I possess. Let me make

my confession plain and clear. I am, by a sort of predestination, a Socialist. I perceive, I cannot help talking and writing about Socialism, and shaping and forwarding Socialism. I am one of a succession—one of a growing multitude of witnesses, who will continue. It does not—in the larger sense—matter how many generations of us must toil and testify. It does not matter, except as our individual concern, how individually we succeed or fail, what blunders we make, what thwartings we encounter, what follies and inadequacies darken our private hopes and level our personal imaginations to the dust. We have the light. We know what we are for, and that the light that now glimmers so dimly through us must in the end prevail. To us Socialism is no piece of political strategy, no economic opposition of class to class ; it is a plan for the reconstruction of human life, for the replacement of a disorder by order, for the making of a state in which mankind shall live bravely and beautifully beyond our present imagining.

So, largely, I conceive of Socialism. But Socialism and the Socialist movement are two very different things. The Socialist movement is an item in an altogether different scale.

I must confess that the organized Socialist movement, all the Socialist societies and leagues and federations and parties together in England, seem to me no more than the rustling hem of the garment of advancing Socialism. For some years the whole organized Socialist movement seemed to me so unimportant, so irrelevant to that progressive development and realization of a great system of ideas which is Socialism, that, like very many other Socialists, I did not trouble to connect myself with any section of it. I don't believe that the Socialist idea is as yet nearly enough thought out and elaborated for very much of it to be realized of set intention now. Socialism is still essentially education, is study, is a renewal, a profound change in the circle of human thought and motive. The institutions which will express this changed circle of thought are important in-

deed, but with a secondary importance. Socialism is the still incomplete, the still sketchy and sketchily indicative plan of a new life for the world, a new and better way of living, a change of spirit and substance from the narrow selfishness and immediacy and cowardly formalism, the chaotic life of individual accident that is human life to-day, a life that dooms itself and all of us to thwartings and misery. Socialism, therefore, is to be served by thought and expression, in art, in literature, in scientific statement and life, in discussion and the quickening exercise of propaganda ; but the Socialist movement, as one finds it, is too often no more than a hasty attempt to secure a premature realization of some fragmentary suggestion of this great, still plastic design, to the neglect of all other of its aspects. As my own sense of Socialism has enlarged and intensified, I have become more and more impressed by the imperfect Socialism of almost every Socialist movement that is going on ; by its necessarily partial and limited projection from the clotted

cants and habituations of things as they are. Some Socialists quarrel with the Liberal Party and with the Socialist section of the Liberal Party because it does not go far enough, because it does not embody a Socialism uncompromising and complete, because it has not definitely cut itself off from the old traditions, the discredited formulæ, that served before the coming of our great idea. They are blind to the fact that there is no organized Socialism at present, uncompromising and complete, and the Socialists who flatter themselves they represent as much are merely those who have either never grasped or who have forgotten the full implications of Socialism. They are just a little step further, a very little step further in their departure from existing prejudices, in their subservience to existing institutions and existing imperatives.

Take, for example, the Socialism that is popular in New York and Chicago and Germany, and that finds its exponents here typically in the inferior ranks of the Social

Democratic Federation—the crude Marxite teaching. It still awaits permeation by true Socialist conceptions. It is a version of life adapted essentially to the imagination of the working wage earner, and limited by his limitations. It is the vision of poor souls perennially reminded each Monday morning of the shadow and irksomeness of life, perpetually recalled each Saturday pay time to a watery gleam of all that life might be. One of the numberless relationships of life, the relationship of capital or the employer to the employed, is made to overshadow all other relations. Get that put right, "expropriate the idle rich," transfer all capital to the State, make the State the humane, amenable, universal employer—that, to innumerable Socialist working men, is the horizon. The rest he sees in the forms of the life to which he is accustomed. A little home, a trifle larger and brighter than his present one, a more abounding table, a cheerful missus released from factory work and unhealthy competition with men, a bright and healthy

family going to and fro to the public free schools, free medical attendance, universal State insurance for old age, free trams to Burnham Beeches, shorter hours of work and higher wages, no dismissals, no hunting for work that eludes one. All the wide world of collateral consequences that will follow from the cessation of the system of employment under conditions of individualist competition, he does not seem to apprehend. Such phrases as the citizenship and economic independence of women leave him cold. That Socialism has anything to say about the economic basis of the family, about the social aspects of marriage, about the rights of the parent, doesn't, I think, at first occur to him at all. Nor does he realize for a long time that for Socialism and under Socialist institutions will there be needed any system of self-discipline, any rules of conduct further than the natural impulses and the native goodness of man. He takes just that aspect of Socialism that appeals to him, and that alone, and it is only exceptionally at present, and very slowly,

as a process of slow habituation and enlargement, that he comes to any wider conceptionis. And, as a consequence, directly we pass to any social type to which weekly or monthly wages is not the dominating fact of life, and a simple unthinking faith in Yes or No decisions its dominant habit, the phrasings, the formulæ, the statements and the discreet omissions of the leaders of working-class Socialism fail to appeal.

Socialism commends itself to a considerable proportion of the working class simply as a beneficial change in the conditions of work and employment ; to other sections of the community it presents itself through equally limited aspects. Certain ways of living it seems to condemn root and branch. To the stockbroker and many other sorts of trader, to the usurer, to the company promoter, to the retired butler who has invested his money in " weekly property," for example, it stands for the dissolution of all comprehensible social order. It simply repudiates the way of living to which they have committed themselves.

And to great numbers of agreeable unintelligent people who live upon rent and interest it is a projected severing of every bond that holds man and man, that keeps servants respectful, tradespeople in order, railways and hotels available, and the whole procedure of life going. They class Socialism and Anarchism together in a way that is as logically unjust as it is from their point of view justifiable. Both cults have this in common, that they threaten to wipe out the whole world of the villa resident. And this sense of a threatened profound disturbance in their way of living pervades the attitude of nearly all the comfortable classes towards Socialism.

When we discuss the attitude of the middle classes to Socialism we must always bear this keener sense of disconcerting changes in mind. It is a part of the queer composition of the human animal that its desire for happenings is balanced by an instinctive dread of real changes of condition. People, especially fully adult people, are creatures who have grown accustomed to a certain method

of costume, a certain system of meals, a certain dietary, certain apparatus, a certain routine. They know their way about in life as it is. They would be lost in Utopia. Quite little alterations "put them out," as they say—create a distressing feeling of inadequacy, make them "feel odd." Whatever little enlargements they may contemplate in reverie, in practice they know they want nothing except, perhaps, a little more of all the things they like. That's the way with most of us, anyhow. To make a fairly complete intimation of the nature of Socialism to an average, decent, middle-aged, middle-class person would be to arouse emotions of unspeakable terror, if the whole project didn't also naturally clothe itself in a quality of incredibility. And you will find, as a matter of fact, that your middle-class Socialists belong to two classes ; either they are amiable people who don't understand a bit what Socialism is—and some of the most ardent and serviceable workers for Socialism are of this type—or they are people so unhappily

situated and so unfortunate, or else of such exceptional imaginative force or training (which is itself, perhaps, from the practical point of view, a misfortune), as to be capable of a discontent with life as it is, so passionate as to outweigh instinctive timidities and discretions. Rest assured that to make any large section of the comfortable upper middle class Socialists, you must either misrepresent, and more particularly under-represent Socialism, or you must quicken their imaginations far beyond the present state of affairs.

Some of the most ardent and serviceable of Socialist workers, I have said, are of the former type. For the most part they are philanthropic people, or women and men of the managing temperament shocked into a sort of Socialism by the more glaring and melodramatic cruelties of our universally cruel social system. They are the district visitors of Socialism. They do not realize that Socialism demands any change in themselves or in their way of living, they perceive in it simply a way of hope from the

failures of vulgar charity. Chiefly they assail the bad conditions of life of the lower classes. They don't for a moment envisage a time when there will be no lower classes—that is beyond them altogether. Much less can they conceive of a time when there will be no governing class distinctively in possession of *means*. They exact respect from inferiors ; no touch of Socialist warmth or light qualifies their arrogant manners. Perhaps they, too, broaden their conception of Socialism as time goes on, but so it begins with them. Now to make Socialists of this type the appeal is a very different one from the talk of class war and expropriation, and the abolition of the idle rich, which is so serviceable with a roomful of sweated workers. These people are moved partly by pity, and the best of them by a hatred for the squalor and waste of the present *régime*. Talk of the expropriated rich simply raises in their minds painful and disconcerting images of distressed gentlewomen. But one necessary aspect of the Socialist's vision that sends the coldest

shiver down the spine of the working class Socialist is extraordinarily alluring and congenial to them, namely, the official and organized side. They love to think of houses and factories open to competent inspection, of municipal milk, sealed and certificated for every cottager's baby, of old age pensions and a high and rising minimum standard of life. They have an admirable sense of sanitation. They are the philanthropic and administrative Socialists as distinguished from the economic revolutionaries.

This class of Socialist passes insensibly into the merely Socialistic philanthropist of the wealthy middle class to whom we owe so much helpful expenditure upon experiments in housing, in museum and school construction, in educational endowment, and so forth.

Their activities are not for one moment to be despised ; they are a constant demonstration to dull and sceptical persons that things may be different, better, prettier, kindlier and more orderly. Many people impervious to tracts can be set thinking by

a model village or a model factory. However petty much of what they achieve may be, there it is achieved—in legislation, in bricks and mortar. Among other things, these administrative Socialists serve to correct the very perceptible tendency of most working men Socialists to sentimental anarchism in regard to questions of control and conduct, a tendency due entirely to their social and administrative inexperience.

For more thorough-going Socialism among the middle classes one must look to those strata and sections in which quickened imaginations and unsettling influences are to be found. The artist should be extraordinarily attracted by Socialism. A mind habitually directed to beauty as an end must necessarily be exceptionally awake to the ugly congestions of our contemporary civilization, to the prolific futile production of gawky, ill-mannered, jostling new things, to the shabby profit-seeking that ousts beauty from life and poisons every enterprise of man. And not only artistic work, but the better sort of

scientific investigation, the better sort of literary work, and every occupation that involves the persistent free use of thought, must bring the mind more and more towards the definite recognition of our social incoherence and waste. But this by no means exhausts the professions that ought to have a distinct bias for Socialism. The engineer, the architect, the mechanical inventor, the industrial organizer, and every sort of maker must be at one in their desire for emancipation from servitude to the promoter, the trader, the lawyer, and the forestaller, from the perpetually recurring obstruction of the claim of the private proprietor to every large and hopeful enterprise, and ready to respond to the immense creative element in the Socialist idea. Only it is that creative element which has so far found least expression in Socialist literature, which appears neither in the "class war" literature of the working class Socialist nor the litigious, inspecting, fining, and regulating tracts and proposals of the administrative Socialist. To too many

of these men in the constructive professions the substitution of a Socialist State for our present economic method carries with it no promise of emancipation at all. They think that to work for the public controls which an advance towards Socialism would set up, would be worse for them and for all that they desire to do than the profit-seeking, expense-cutting, mercenary making of the present *régime*.

This is, I believe, a temporary and alterable state, contrary to the essential and permanent spirit of those engaged in constructive work. It is due very largely to the many misrepresentations and partial statements of Socialism that have rendered it palatable and assimilable to the working men and the administrative Socialist. Socialism has been presented on the one hand as a scheme of expropriation to a clamorous popular government of working men, far more ignorant and incapable of management than a shareholders' meeting, and, on the other, as a scheme for the encouragement of stupid little

municipal authorities of the contemporary type in impossible business undertakings under the guidance of fussy, energetic, legal minded and totally unscientific instigators. Except for the quite recent development of Socialist thought that is now being embodied in the *New Heptarchy Series* of the Fabian Society, scarcely anything has been done to dispel these reasonable dreads. I should think that from the point of view of Socialist propaganda, the time is altogether ripe now for a fresh and more vigorous insistence upon the materially creative aspect of the vision of Socialism, an aspect which is, after all, much more cardinal and characteristic than any aspect that has hitherto been presented systematically to the world. An enormous re-building, remaking, and expansion is integral in the Socialist dream. We want to get the land out of the control of the private owners among whom it is cut up, we want to get houses, factories, railways, mines, farms out of the dispersed management of their proprietors, not in order to secure their

present profits and hinder development, but in order to rearrange these things in a saner and finer fashion. An immense work of replanning, rebuilding, redistributing lies in the foreground of the Socialist vista. We contemplate an enormous clearance of existing things. We want an unfettered hand to make beautiful and convenient homes, splendid cities, noiseless great highways, beautiful bridges, clean, swift and splendid electric railways ; we are inspired by a faith in the coming of clean, wide and simple methods of agricultural production. But it is only now that Socialism is beginning to be put in these terms. So put it, and the engineer and the architect and the scientific organizer, agricultural or industrial—all the best of them, anyhow—will find it correspond extraordinarily to their way of thinking.

Not all of them, of course. A middle-aged architect with a note-book full of bits of gothic, and a reputation for suburban churches, or full of bits of “Queen Anne” and a connexion among villa builders, or an engineer

paterfamilias who has tasted blood as an expert witness, aren't to be won by these suggestions. They're part of things as they are. But that is only a temporary inconvenience to Socialism. The young men do respond, and they are the future and what Socialism needs.

And there's another great constructive profession that should be Socialist altogether, and that is the medical profession. Especially does Socialism claim the younger men who haven't yet sunken from the hospitals to the trading individualism of a practice. And then there are the teachers, the school-masters and schoolmistresses. The idea of a great organized making is innate in the quality of their professions ; the making of sound bodies and healthy conditions, the making of informed and disciplined minds. The methods of the profit-seeking school-master, the practice-buying doctor are imposed upon them by the necessities of an individualist world. Both these two great professions present nowadays, side by side,

two types—the new type, highly qualified, official, administrative, scientific, public-spirited ; the old type, capitalistic, with a pretentious house and equipment, the doctor with a brougham, and a dispensary, the schoolmaster or schoolmistress with some huge old stucco house converted by jerry-built extensions to meet scholastic needs. Who would not rather, one may ask, choose the former way who was not already irrevocably committed to the latter ? Well, I with my Socialist dreams would like to answer " No one," but I'm learning to check my buoyant optimism. The imagination and science in a young man may cry out for the public position, for the valiant public work, for the hard, honourable, creative years. He may sit with his fellow-students and his fellow-workers in a nocturnal cloud of tobacco smoke and fine talk, and vow himself to research and the creative world state. In the morning he will think he has dreamed ; he will recall what the world is, what Socialists are, what he has heard wild Socialists say

about science and his art. He will elect for the real world and a practice.

Something more than a failure to state the constructive and educational quality in Socialism on the part of its exponents has to be admitted in accounting for the unnatural want of sympathetic co-operation between them and the bulk of these noble professions. I cannot disguise from myself certain curiously irrelevant strands that have interwoven with the partial statements of Socialism current in England, and which it is high time, I think, for Socialists to repudiate. Socialism is something more than an empty criticism of our contemporary disorder and waste of life, it is a great intimation of construction, organization, science and education. But concurrently with its extension and its destructive criticism of the capitalistic individualism of to-day, there has been another movement, essentially an anarchist movement, hostile to machinery and apparatus, hostile to medical science, hostile to order, hostile to education, a Rousseauite move-

ment in the direction of a sentimentalized naturalism, a Tolstoyan movement in the direction of a non-resisting pietism, which has not simply been confused with the Socialist movement, but has really affected and interwoven with it. It is not simply that wherever discussion and destructive criticism of the present conventional bases of society occur, both ways of thinking crop up together; they occur all too often as alternating phases in the same individual. Few of us are so clear-headed as to be free from profound self-contradictions. So that it is no great marvel, after all, if the presentation of Socialism has got mixed up with Return-to-Nature ideas, with proposals for living in a state of unregulated primitive virtue in purely hand-made houses, upon rain water and uncooked fruit. We Socialists have to disentangle it from these things now. We have to disavow, with all necessary emphasis, that gibing at science and the medical profession, at schools and books and the necessary apparatus for collective think-

ing, which has been one of our little ornamental weaknesses in the past. That has, I know, kept a very considerable number of intelligent professional men from inquiring further into Socialist theories and teachings. As a consequence there are, especially in the medical profession, quite a number of unconscious Socialists, men, often with a far clearer grip upon the central ideas of Socialism than many of its professed exponents, who have worked out these ideas for themselves, and are incredulous to hear them called Socialistic.

So much for the specifically creative and imagination-using professions. Throughout the whole range of the more educated middle classes, however, there are causes at work that necessarily stimulate thought towards Socialism, that engender scepticisms, promote inquiries leading towards what is at present the least expounded of all aspects of Socialism —the relation of Socialism to the institution of the Family. . . .

The Family, and not the individual, is still the unit in contemporary civilization, and

indeed in nearly all social systems that have ever existed. The adult male, the head of the family, has been the citizen, the sole representative of the family in the State. About him have been grouped his one or more wives, his children, his dependents. His position towards them has always been —is still in many respects to this day—one of ownership. He was owner of them all, and in many of the less sophisticated systems of the past his ownership was as complete as over his horse and house and land—more complete than over his land. He could sell his children into slavery, barter his wives. There has been a secular mitigation of the rights of this sort of private property ; the establishment of monogamy, for instance, did for the family what President Roosevelt's proposed legislation against large accumulations might do for industrial enterprises, but to this day in our own community, for all such mitigations and many euphemisms, the ownership of the head of the family is still a manifest fact. He votes. He keeps

and protects. He determines the education and professions of his children. He is entitled to monetary consolation for any infringement of his rights over wife or daughter. Every intelligent woman understands that, as a matter of hard fact, beneath all the civilities of to-day, she is actual or potential property, and has to treat herself and keep herself as that. She may by force or subtlety turn her chains into weapons, she may succeed in exacting a reciprocal property in a man, the fact remains fundamental that she is either isolated or owned.

But I need not go on writing facts with which every one is acquainted. My concern now is to point out that Socialism repudiates the private ownership of the head of the family as completely as it repudiates any other sort of private ownership. Socialism involves the responsible citizenship of women, their economic independence of men, and all the personal freedom that follows that, it intervenes between the children and the parents, claiming to support them, protect

them, and educate them for its own ampler purposes. Socialism, in fact, is the State family. The old family of the private individual must vanish before it, just as the old water works of private enterprise, or the old gas company. They are incompatible with it. Socialism assails the triumphant egotism of the family to-day, just as Christianity did in its earlier and more vital centuries. So far as English Socialism is concerned (and the thing is still more the case in America) I must confess that the assault has displayed a quite extraordinary instinct for taking cover, but that is a question of tactics rather than of essential antagonism.

It is possible to believe that so far as the middle classes are concerned this discretion has been carried altogether too far. Socialists would have forwarded their cause better if they had been more outspoken. It has led to preposterous misunderstandings ; and among others to the charge that Socialism implied free-love. . . . The middle-class family, I am increasingly convinced, is a group in a

state of tension. I believe that a modest but complete statement of the Socialist criticism of the family and the proposed Socialist substitute for the conventional relationships might awaken extraordinary responses at the present time. The great terror of the eighties and early nineties that crushed all reasonable discussion of sexual relationship is, I believe, altogether over.

The whole of the present system is riddled with discontents. One factor is the enhanced sense of the child in middle-class life : the old sentiment was that the parent owned the child, the new is that the children own the parents. There has come an intensified respect for children, an immense increase in the trouble, attention and expenditure devoted to them—and a very natural and human accompaniment in the huge fall in the middle-class birth-rate. It is felt that to bear and rear children is the most noble and splendid and responsible thing in life, and an increasing number of people modestly evade it. People see more clearly the social service of paren-

tage, and are more and more inclined to demand a recognition from the State for this service. The middle-class parent might conceivably be horrified if you suggested the State should pay him for his offspring, but he would have no objection whatever to being indirectly and partially paid by a differential income tax graduated in relation to the size of his family.

With this increased sense of the virtue and public service of parentage there has gone on a great development of the criticism of schools and teaching. The more educated middle-class parent has become an amateur educationist of considerable virulence. He sees more and more distinctly the inadequacy of his own private attempts to educate, the necessary charlatany and insufficiency of the private adventure school. He finds much to envy in the elementary schools. If he is ignorant and short-sighted, he joins in the bitter cry of the middle classes, and clamours against the pampering of the working class, and the rising of the rates which renders his

efforts to educate his own children more difficult. But a more intelligent type of middle-class parent sends his boy in for public scholarships, sets to work to get educational endowment for his own class also, and makes another step towards Socialism. Moreover, the increasing intelligence of the middle-class parent and the steady swallowing up of the smaller capitalists and smaller shareholders by the larger enterprises and fortunes, alike bring home to him the temporary and uncertain nature of the advantages his private efforts give his children over those of the working man. He sees no more than a brief respite for them against the economic cataclysms of the coming time. He is more and more alive to the presence of secular change in the world. He does not feel sure his sons will carry on the old business, continue the old practice. He begins to appreciate the concentration of wealth. The secular development of the capitalistic system robs him more and more of his sense of securities. He is uneasier than he used to be about investments. He no

longer has that complete faith in private insurance companies that once sustained him. His mind broadens out to State insurance as to State education. He is far more amenable than he used to be to the idea that the only way to provide for one's own posterity is to provide for every one's posterity, to merge parentage in citizenship. The family of the middle-class man which fights for itself alone, is lost.

Socialism comes into the middle-class family offering education, offering assurances for the future, and only very distantly intimating the price to be paid in weakened individual control. But far profounder disintegrations are at work. The internal character of the middle-class family is altering fundamentally with the general growth of intelligence, with the higher education of women, with the comings and goings for this purpose and that, the bicycles and games, the enlarged social appetites and opportunities of a new time. The more or less conscious *Strike against Parentage* is having far-reaching effects. The

family proper becomes a numerically smaller group. Enormous numbers of childless families appear ; the middle-class family with two, or at most three, children is the rule rather than the exception in certain strata. This makes the family a less various and interesting group, with a smaller demand for attention, emotion, effort. Quite apart from the general mental quickening of the time, it leaves more and more social energy, curiosity, enterprise free, either to fret within the narrow family limits or to go outside them. The *Strike against Parentage* takes among other forms the form of a strike against marriage : great numbers of men and women stand out from a relationship which every year seems more limiting and (except for its temporary passional aspect) purposeless. The number of intelligent and healthy women inadequately employed, who either idle as wives in attenuated modern families, childless or with an insufficient child or so, or who work for an unsatisfying subsistence as unmarried women, increases. To them the complete concep-

tions of Socialism should have an extraordinary appeal.

The appearance of the feminine mind and soul in the world as something distinct and self-conscious, is the appearance of a distinct new engine of criticism against the individualist family, against this dwindling property of the once-ascendant male—who no longer effectually rules, no longer, in many cases, either protects or sustains, who all too often is so shorn of his beams as to be but a vexatious power of jealous restriction and interference upon his wife and children. The educated girl resents the proposed loss of her freedom in marriage, the educated married woman realizes as well as resents the losses of scope and interest marriage entails. If it were not for the economic disadvantages that make intelligent women dread a solitary old age in bitter poverty, vast numbers of women who are married to-day would have remained single independent women. This discontent of women is a huge available force for Socialism. The wife of the past was, to put it

brutally, caught younger—so young that she had had no time to think—she began forthwith to bear babies, rear babies, and (which she did in a quite proportionate profusion) bury babies—she never had a moment to think. Now the wife with double the leisure, double the education and half the emotional scope of her worn prolific grandmother, sits at home and thinks things over. You find her letting herself loose in clubs, in literary enterprises, in schemes for joint households to relieve herself and her husband from the continuation of a dialogue that has exhausted its interest. The husband finds himself divided between his sympathetic sense of tedium and the proprietary tradition in which we live.

For these tensions in the disintegration of the old proprietary family no remedy offers itself to-day except the solutions that arise as essential portions of the Socialist scheme. The alternative is hypocrisy and disorder.

There is yet another and still more effectual system of strains at work in the existing social unit, and that is the strain between

parents and children. That has always existed. It is one of our most transparent sentimental pretences that there is any natural subordination of son to father, of daughter to mother. As a matter of fact a good deal of natural antagonism appears at the adolescence of the young. Something very like an instinct stirs in them, to rebel, to go out. The old habits of solicitude, control and restraint in the parent become more and more hampering, irksome, and exasperating to the offspring. The middle-class son gets away in spirit and in fact to school, to college, to business—his sister does all she can to follow his excellent example. In a world with vast moral and intellectual changes in progress the intelligent young find the personal struggle for independence intensified by a conflict of ideas. The modern tendency to cherish and preserve youthfulness; the keener desire for living that prevents women getting fat and ugly, and men bald and incompetent by forty-five, is another dissolvent factor among these stresses. The

daughter is not only restrained by her mother's precepts, but inflamed by her example. The son finds his father's coevals treating him as a contemporary.

Well, into these conflicts and disorders comes Socialism, and Socialism alone, to explain, to justify, to propose new conventions and new interpretations of relationship, to champion the reasonable claims of the young, to mitigate the thwarted ownership of the old. Socialism comes, constructive amid the wreckage.

Let me at this point, and before I conclude, put one thing with the utmost possible clearness. The Socialist does not propose to destroy something that conceivably would otherwise last for ever, when he proposes a new set of institutions, and a new system of conduct to replace the old proprietary family. He no more regards the institution of marriage as a permanent thing than he regards a state of competitive industrialism as a permanent thing. In the economic sphere, quite apart from any Socialist ideas or

Socialist activities, it is manifest that competitive individualism destroys itself. This was reasoned out long ago in the *Capital* of Marx ; it is receiving its first gigantic practical demonstration in the United States of America. Whatever happens, we believe that competitive industrialism will change and end—and we Socialists at least believe that the alternative to some form of Socialism is tyranny and social ruin. So, too, in the social sphere, whether Socialists succeed altogether or fail altogether, or in whatever measure they succeed or fail, it does not alter the fact that the family is weakening, dwindling, breaking up, disintegrating. The alternative to a planned and organized Socialism is not the maintenance of the present system, but its logical development, and that is all too plainly a growing complication of pretences as the old imperatives weaken and fade. We already live in a world of stupendous hypocrisies, a world wherein rakes and rascals champion the sacred institution of the family, and a network of sexual secrets, vaguely

suspected, disagreeably present, and only half-concealed, pervades every social group one enters. Cynicism, a dismal swamp of base intrigues, cruel restrictions and habitual insincerities, is the manifest destiny of the present *régime* unless we make some revolutionary turn. It cannot work out its own salvation without the profoundest change in its determining ideas. And what change in those ideas is offered except by the Socialist?

In relation to all these most intimate aspects of life, Socialism, and Socialism alone, supplies the hope and suggestions of clean and practicable solutions. So far, Socialists have either been silent or vague, or—let us say—tactful, in relation to this central tangle of life. To begin to speak plainly among the silences and suppressions, the “find out for yourself” of the current time, would be, I think, to grip the middle-class woman and the middle-class youth of both sexes with an extraordinary new interest, to irradiate the dissensions of every bored couple and every squabbling family with broad conceptions,

and enormously to enlarge and stimulate the Socialist movement at the present time.

Here ends the paper read by Mr. Wells to the Fabian Society, but in this that follows he sets out the Socialist conception of the new relations that must follow the old much more clearly.

II

I DO not think that the general reader at all appreciates the steady development of Socialist thought during the past two decades. Directly one comes into close contact with contemporary Socialists one discovers in all sorts of ways the evidence of the synthetic work that has been and still is in process, the clearing and growth of guiding ideas, the qualification of primitive statements, the consideration, the adaptation to meet this or that adequate criticism. A quarter of a century ago Socialism was still to a very large extent a doctrine of negative, a passionate criticism and denial of the theories that sustained and excused the injustices of contemporary life, a repudiation of social and economic methods then held to be indispensable and in the very nature of things. Its positive proposals were as sketchy

as they were enthusiastic, sketchy and, it must be confessed, fluctuating. One needs to turn back to the files of its every-day publications to realize the progress that has been made, the secular emergence of a consistent and continually more nearly complete and directive scheme of social reconstruction from the chaotic propositions and hopes and denials of the earlier time. In no direction is this more evident than in the steady clearing of the Socialistic attitude towards marriage and the family; in the disentanglement of Socialism from much idealist and irrelevant matter with which it was once closely associated and encumbered, in the orderly incorporation of conceptions that at one time seemed not only outside of, but hostile to, Socialist ways of thinking. . . .

Nothing could have brought out this more clearly than the comical attempt made recently by the *Daily Express* to suggest that Mr. Keir Hardie and the party he leads was mysteriously involved with my unfortunate self in teaching Free Love to respectable

working men. When my heat and indignation had presently a little subsided, I found myself asking how it came about, that any one could bring together such discrepant things as the orderly proposals of Socialism as they shape themselves in the projects of Mr. Keir Hardie, let us say, and the doctrine of sexual go-as-you-please. And so inquiring, my mind drifted back to the days—it is a hazy period to me—when Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were alive, when Shelley explained his views to Harriet. These people were in a sort of way Socialists ; Palaeo-Socialists. They professed also very distinctly that uncovenanted freedom of action in sexual matters which is, I suppose, Free Love. Indeed, so near are we to these old confusions that there is still, I find, one Palaeo-Socialist surviving—Mr. Belfort Bax. In that large undifferentiated past, all sorts of ideas, as yet too ill defined to eliminate one another, socialist ideas, communist ideas, anarchist ideas, Rousseauism, seethed together and seemed akin. In a sense they were akin

in that they were the condemnation of the existing order, the outcome of the destructive criticism of this or that aspect or that. They were all *breccia*. But in all else, directly they began to find definite statement, they were flatly contradictory one with another.

Or at least they stood upon different levels of assumption and application.

The formulæ of Anarchism and Socialism are, no doubt, almost diametrically opposed ; Anarchism denies government, Socialism would concentrate all controls in the State, yet it is after all possible in different relations and different aspects to entertain the two. When one comes to dreams, when one tries to imagine one's finest sort of people, one must surely imagine them too fine for control and prohibitions, doing right by a sort of inner impulse, "above the Law." One's dreamland perfection is Anarchy—just as no one would imagine a policeman (or for the matter of that a drain-pipe) in Heaven. But come down to earth, to men the descendants of apes, to men competing to live,

and passionately jealous and energetic, and for the highways and market-places of life at any rate, one asks for law and convention.

In Heaven or any Perfection there will be no Socialism, just as there will be no Bimetallism; there is the sphere of communism, anarchism, universal love and universal service.

It is in the workaday world of limited and egotistical souls that Socialism has its place. All men who dream at all of noble things are Anarchists in their dreams, and half at least of the people who are much in love, I suppose, want to be this much Anarchistic that they do not want to feel under a law or compulsion one with another. They may want to possess, they may want to be wholly possessed, but they do not want a law court or public opinion to protect that possession as a "right."

But it's still not clearly recognized how distinct are the spheres of Anarchism and Socialism. The last instance of this confusion that has seriously affected the common idea of the Socialist was as recent as the late Mr. Grant Allen. He was not, I think, even

in his time a very representative Socialist, but certainly he did present, as if it were a counsel of perfection for this harsh and grimy world, something very like reckless abandonment to the passion or mood of the moment. I doubt if he would have found a dozen supporters in the Fabian Society in his own time. I should think his teaching would have appealed far more powerfully to extreme individualists of the type of Mr. Auberon Herbert. However that may be, I do not think there is at present among English and American Socialists any representative figure at all counselling Free Love. The modern tendency is all towards an amount of control over the function of reproduction, if anything, in excess of that exercised by the State and public usage to-day. Let me make a brief comparison of existing conditions with what I believe to be the ideals of most of my fellow Socialists in this matter, and the reader can then judge for himself between the two systems of intervention.

And first let me run over the outline of the

thing we are most likely to forget and have wrong in such a discussion, the thing directly under our noses, the thing that is. People have an odd way of assuming in such a comparison that we are living under an obligation to conform to the moral code of the Christian church at the present time. As a matter of fact we are living in an epoch of extraordinary freedom in sexual matters, mitigated only by certain economic imperatives. Anti-socialist writers have a way of pretending that Socialists want to make Free Love possible, while in reality Free Love is open to any solvent person to-day. People who do not want to marry are as free as air to come together and part again as they choose, there is no law to prevent them, the State takes it out of their children with a certain mild malignancy—that is all. Married people are equally free, saving certain limited proprietary claims upon one another, claims that can always be met by the payment of damages. The restraints are purely restraints of opinion, that would be as powerful tomorrow

if legal marriage was altogether abolished. There was a time, no doubt, when there were actual legal punishments for unchastity in women, but that time has gone, it might seem, for ever. Our State retains only, from an age that held mercantile methods in less honour, a certain habit of persecuting women who sell themselves by retail for money, but this is done in the name of public order and not on account of the act. Such a woman must exact cash payments, she cannot recover debts, she is placed at a ridiculous disadvantage towards her landlord (which makes accommodating her peculiarly lucrative), and she is exposed to various inconveniences of street regulation and status that must ultimately corrupt any police force in the world —for all that she seems to continue in the land with a certain air of prosperity. Beyond that our control between man and woman is nil. Our society to-day has in fact no complete system of sexual morals at all. It has the remains of a system.

It has the remains of a monogamic pat-

riarchal system, in which a responsible man owned nearly absolutely wife and offspring. All its laws and sentiments alike are derived from the reduction and qualification of that.

These are not the pretensions indeed of the present system such as it is, but they are the facts. And even the present disorder, one gathers, is unstable. One hears on every hand of its further decadence. From Father Vaughan to President Roosevelt, and volleying from the whole bench of bishops, comes the witness to that. Not only the old breaches grow wider and more frequent, but in the very penetralia of the family the decay goes on. The birth-rate falls—and falls. The family fails more and more in its essential object. This is a process absolutely independent of any Socialist propaganda ; it is part of the normal development of the existing social and economic system. It makes for sterilization, for furtive wantonness and dishonour. The existing system produces no remedies at all. Prominent people break out ever and again into vehement scoldings

of this phenomenon ; the newspapers and magazines re-echo "Race Suicide," but there is no sign whatever in the statistical curves of the smallest decimal per cent. of response to these exhortations.

Our existing sexual order is a system in decay. What are the alternatives to its steady process of collapse ? That is the question we have to ask ourselves. To heap foul abuse, as many quite honest but terror-stricken people seem disposed to do, on any one who attempts to discuss any alternative, is simply to accelerate this process. To me it seems there are three main directions along which things may go in the future, and between which rational men have to choose.

The first is to regard the present process as inevitable and moving towards the elimination of weak and gentle types, to clear one's mind of the prejudices of one's time, and to contemplate a disintegration of all the realities of the family into an epoch of Free Love, mitigated by mercantile necessities and a few

transparent hypocrisies. Rich men will be free to live lives of irresponsible polygamy ; poor men will do what they can ; women's life will be adventurous, the population will decline in numbers and perhaps in quality. (To guard against that mischievous quoter who lies in wait for all Socialist writers, let me say at once that this state of affairs is anti-socialist, is, I believe, socially destructive, and does not commend itself to me at all.)

The second direction is towards reaction, an attempt to return to the simple old conceptions of our past, to the patriarchal family, that is to say, of the middle ages. This I take to be the conception of such a Liberal as Mr. G. K. Chesterton, or such a Conservative as Lord Hugh Cecil, and to be also as much idea as one can find underlying most tirades against modern morals. The rights of the parent will be insisted on and restored, and the parent means pretty distinctly the father. Subject to the influence of a powerful and well-organized Church, a rejuvenescent Church, he is to resume that control over

wife and children of which the modern State has partially deprived him. The development of secular education is to be arrested, particular stress is to be laid upon the wickedness of any intervention with natural reproductive processes, the spread of knowledge in certain directions is to be made criminal, and early marriages are to be encouraged. . . . I do not by any means regard this as an impossible programme ; I believe that in many directions it is quite a practicable one ; it is in harmony with great masses of feeling in the country, and with many natural instincts. It would not of course affect the educated wealthy and leisurely upper class in the community, who would be able and intelligent enough to impose their own private glosses upon its teaching, but it would "moralize" the general population, and reduce them to a state of prolific squalor. Its realization would be, I believe, almost inevitably accompanied by a decline in sanitation, and a correlated rise in birth-rate and death-rate, for life would be cheap, and drainpipes and

antiseptics dear, and it is quite conceivable that after some stresses, a very nearly stable social equilibrium would be attained. After all it is this simple sort of life, without drains and without education, with child labour (in the open air for the most part until the eighteenth century—though that is a detail) and a consequent straightforward desire for remunerative children that has been the normal life of humanity for many thousands of years. We might not succeed in getting back to a landed peasantry, we might find large masses of the population would hang up obstinately in industrial towns—towns that in their simple naturalness of congestion might come to resemble the Chinese pattern pretty closely ; but I have no doubt we could move far in that direction with very little difficulty indeed.

The third direction is towards the developing conceptions of Socialism. And it must be confessed at once that these, as they emerge steadily and methodically from mere generalities and confusions, do present themselves as being in many aspects, novel and

untried. They are as untested, and in many respects as alarming, as steam traction or iron shipping were in 1830. They display, clearly and unambiguously, principles already timidly admitted in practice and sentiment to-day, but as yet admitted only confusedly and amidst a cloud of contradictions. Essentially the Socialist position is a denial of property in human beings ; not only must land and the means of production be liberated from the multitude of little monarchs among whom they are distributed, to the general injury and inconvenience, but women and children, just as much as men and things, must cease to be owned. Socialism indeed proposes to abolish altogether the patriarchal family amidst whose disintegrating ruins we live, and to raise women to an equal citizenship with men. It proposes to give a man no more property in a woman than a woman has in a man. To stupid people who cannot see the difference between a woman and a thing, the abolition of the private ownership of women takes the form of having "wives in

common," and suggests the Corroboree. It is obviously nothing of the sort. It is the recognition in theory of what in many classes is already the fact,—the practical equality of men and women in a civilized state. It is quite compatible with a marriage contract of far greater stringency than that recognized throughout Christendom to-day.

Now what sort of contract will the Socialist state require for marriage ? Here again there are perfectly clear and simple principles. Socialism states definitely what almost everybody recognizes nowadays with greater or less clearness, and that is the concern of the State for children. The children people bring into the world can be no more their private concern entirely, than the disease germs they disseminate or the noises a man makes in a thin-floored flat. Socialism says boldly the State is the Over-Parent, the Outer-Parent. People rear children for the State and the future ; if they do that well, they do the whole world a service, and deserve payment just as much as if they built a bridge

or raised a crop of wheat ; if they do it unpropitiously and ill, they have done the world an injury. Socialism denies altogether the right of any one to beget children carelessly and promiscuously, and for the prevention of disease and evil births alike the Socialist is prepared for an insistence upon intelligence and self-restraint quite beyond the current practice.) At present we deal with all that sort of thing as an infringement of private proprietary rights ; the Socialist holds it is the world that is injured.

It follows that motherhood, which we still in a muddle-headed way seem to regard as partly self-indulgence and partly a service paid to a man by a woman, is regarded by the Socialists as a benefit to society, a public duty done. It may be in many cases a duty full of pride and happiness—that is beside the mark. The State will pay for children born legitimately in the marriage it will sanction. A woman with healthy and successful offspring will draw a wage for each one of them from the State, so long as they go on well. It will be her wage. Under the State she will control

her child's upbringing. How far her husband will share in the power of direction is a matter of detail upon which opinion may vary—and does vary widely among Socialists. I suppose for the most part they incline to the conception of a joint control. So the monstrous injustice of the present time which makes a mother dependent upon the economic accidents of her man, which plunges the best of wives and the most admirable of children into abject poverty if he happens to die, which visits his sins of waste and carelessness upon them far more than upon himself, will disappear. So too the still more monstrous absurdity of women discharging their supreme social function, bearing and rearing children in their spare time, as it were, while they "earn their living" by contributing some half mechanical element to some trivial industrial product, will disappear.

That is the gist of the Socialist attitude towards marriage ; the repudiation of private ownership of women and children, and the payment of mothers. Partially but already very extensively, socialistic ideas have spread

through the whole body of our community ; they are the saving element in what would otherwise be a moral catastrophe now, and the Socialist simply puts with precise definition the conclusions to which all but foolish, ignorant, base or careless people are moving—albeit some are moving thither with averted faces. Already we have the large, still incomplete edifice of free education, and a great mass of legislation against child labour ; we have free baths, free playgrounds, free libraries,—more and more people are coming to admit the social necessity of saving our children from the private enterprise of the milkman who does not sterilize his cans, from the private enterprise of the schoolmaster who cannot teach, from the private enterprise of the employer who takes them on at small wages at thirteen or fourteen to turn them back on our hands as ignorant hooligans and social wastrels at eighteen or twenty. . . . But the straightforward payment to the mother still remains to be brought within the sphere of practical application. To that we shall come.

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